DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 058 573 CG 006 776

AUTHOR Parrott, George L.; Coleman, Georgetta
TITLE Sexual Appeal: In Black and White.
INSTITUTION Sacramento State Coll., Calif.
PUB DATE [71]
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Physical Characteristics; *Racial Attitudes; Racial Factors; *Sex (Characteristics); *Sex Differences; *Sexuality

ABSTRACT

Facial pictures were ranked from characteristically black to clearly white and organized into 3 comparable 6-picture sets of male and female photographs. Pictures were rated for sexual appeal by opposite-sex raters; the raters were either black or white. Results show no sexual appeal effect due to physical characteristics of face for female raters, but a strong effect for males. Black and white males show the same basic response pattern on their ratings while black females gave generally lower ratings to all pictures than white females. (Author)

ED 058573

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Sexual Appeal: In Black and White[1]

George L. Parrott and Georgetta Coleman

Sacramento State College

The popular literature has shown considerable interest in recent research on the psychology of beauty (Science Digest, January 1971; Playboy, January 1971).

Wiggins, Wiggins, and Conger (1970) evolved the theoretical schema from which the Playboy article was developed, and they are quoted by Ford (1971, p. 14) as saying, "It's extremely difficult to calibrate the face; we just ignore it." Their work has been entirely with body preference varying hip, leg, and bust proportions in schematic outline figures.

Very little research has been reported on facial characteristics of sexual appeal, and virtually none is addressed to a possible problem in black-white patterns of sexual attraction. Casual observation indicates that black males may be seen with white females, but the black female is much more rarely seen with the white male. Secord, Bevan, and Katz (1956) used pictures of young male faces, both black and white, and they concluded that physical stereotypes of blacks were equally applied across all degrees of blackness; however personality stereotyping was not so dependent on an all-or-none black-white distinction. From these data, it might be predicted that if sexual appeal is not a function of the ethnic features of the face then appeal ratings should be random or flat across ethnic characteristics, and if sexual appeal is based on ethnic features, its psychological measurement should respond to variations in these features. Secord (1959) followed up his previous study and found that "identification of a photograph as that of a Negro appears to be sufficient to evoke the judgment that the individual

CG 006 776

discriminating between levels of black females (Secord, 1959). Black males are expected to see white females as more appealing than black females; their response pattern should be quite similar to white males.

Method

Subjects: Raters were randomly selected from students in the cafeteria at Sacramento City College[2] and Sacramento State College (N = 68, 8 respectively). The total sample was evenly divided in Blacks and Whites, males and females.

Photographs and Rating Forms: Pictures were selected from recent college yearbooks of other schools and enlarged to approximately 3 by 5 inches. Final selection eliminated faces with any unusual or special features. Three completely different, but equated, booklets of pictures were formed with a male and female picture side of three Blacks and three Whites in each sex group. The six pictures in each sex set ranged from strongly black (thicker lips, wider nose, prominent cheekbones) to strongly white (thin lips, narrow nose, smooth cheekbones). The ranking of the pictures was done using a six order scale and pictures selected for use where consensus was reached on their ranking by the research team.[3] The three black female pictures with a #1 rating were the individuals with the thinnest lips, narrowest noses, etc.; the three black females with a #3 rating had the thicker lips, wider noses, etc. For the white females those with a rating #1 had the thicker lips, wider noses, etc., in their group; white females with ratings at #3 had the thinner lips, narrower noses, etc. The males' pictures in each ethnic group were ordered on the same basis. Each picture was rated on several semantic differential type scales with six response positions. Of interest here is the scale sexually appealing-sexually unappealing.

Results

The patterns of sexual appeal ratings as a function of the characteristics of the faces are summarized in Figure 1 for both male and female.

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
Insert Figure 1 about here
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

With male raters, a significant F for face type ($F = 11.6$, df 5/180, $p < .001$) and for face type by ethnic group of rater ($F = 5.4$, df 5/180, $p < .001$) was indicated. The interaction comes from a higher rating by Whites on the white female #2 ($p < .08$) and particularly #3 ($p < .01$). The F between black and white raters was not reliable ($F < 1$).

For the female raters, no significant effect due to facial type or facial type by ethnic group of rater interaction was shown ($p > .05$). However an unexpected difference showing generally lower ratings being given by black females for all picture types was present ($F = 8.6$, df 1/36, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Males show a clear sexual rating pattern based on the physical features of the female's face, and physical features tend to be even more influential than the black-white distinction at first inspection. However, the nearness of all the black female's ratings, by both black and white males, to the midpoint of the six point rating scale may be suggestive of a very low level of sexual appeal value. Black girls may not be seen as either sexually appealing or unappealing -- they may be judged as neutral. Only the ratings for the black females with the thinner lips, narrower nose and smooth cheekbones tended away from the midpoint of the rating scale. If the broad culture defines sexual appeal in terms of the white stereotype, and this is specifically true for females, then the total rating pattern may be understood. Black females, if this is true, may feel consistent

frustration in their desire to meet this sexual ideal and in this frustration repress sexual responses. This would theoretically explain the black-white differences in the female's ratings of male pictures. Further research seems warranted into black-white differences in female sexual response patterns.

References

Ford, B. Who's beautiful to whom -- and why? Science Digest, 1971, 69, 9-15.

Hraba, J. & Grant, G. Black is beautiful: a reexamination of racial preference and identification. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1970, 16, 398-402.

Malpass, R. S. & Kravitz, J. Recognition of faces of own and other race. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1969, 13, 330-334.

Secord, P. F. Stereotyping and favorableness in the perception of Negro faces. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1959, 59, 309-314.

Secord, P. F., Bevan, W. & Katz, B. The Negro stereotype and perceptual accentuation. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1956, 53, 78-83.

Secord, P. F., Dukes, W. F. & Bevan, W. Personalities in faces: I. an experiment in social perceiving. Genetic Psychology Monographs, 1954, 49, 231-279.

Secord, P. F. & Muthard, J. E. Personalities in faces: IV. a descriptive analysis of the perception of women's faces and the identification of some physiognomic determinants. The Journal of Psychology, 1955, 39, 269-273.

Wiggins, J. S., Wiggins, N. & Conger, J. C. Correlates of heterosexual somatic preference. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1968, 10, 82-90.

Footnotes

[1] Many thanks are due the assistance of Don Klopp and Bill Duston of the SSC A-V department for the preparation of the photo sets.

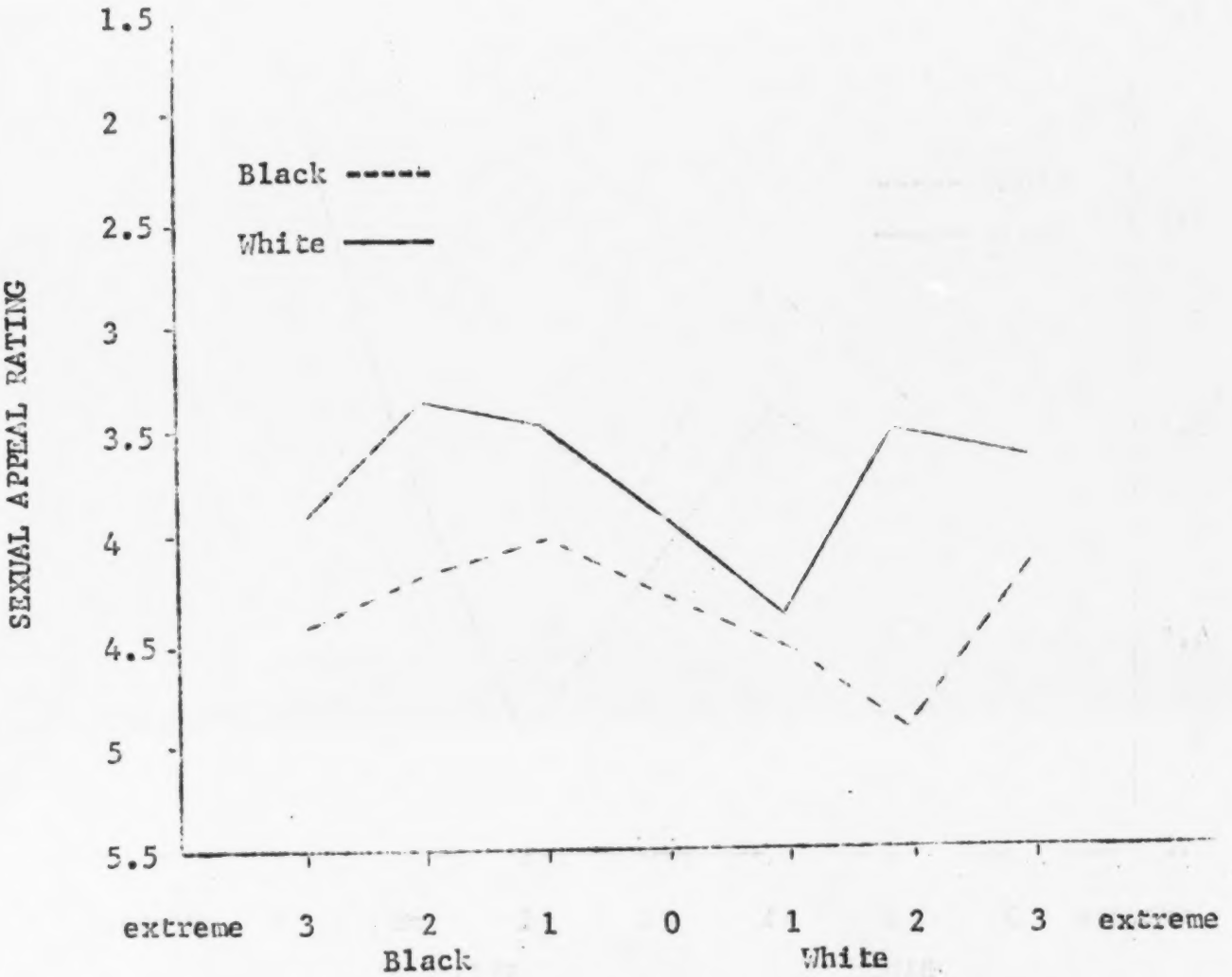
[2] A junior college controlled lately by politically active Blacks; Angela Davis was selected homecoming queen this past Fall.

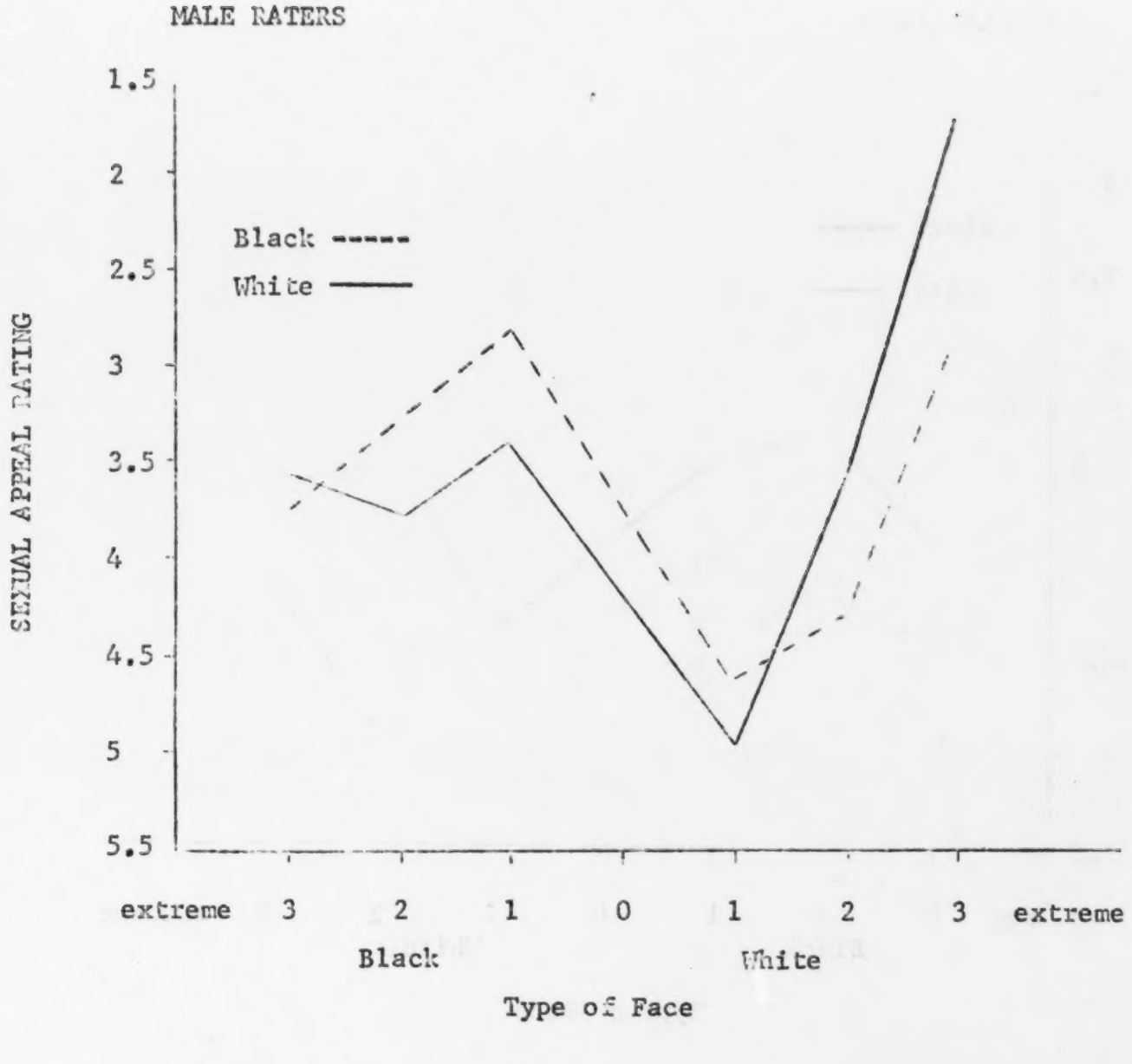
[3] Joe Carr and Robbin Durfee ably assisted data collection.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Summary of sexual appeal ratings by types of face for all groups.

FEMALE RATERS




MALE RATERS
SEXUAL APPEAL RATING
1.5
2
2.5
3
3.5
4
4.5
5
5.5
Black -----
White ——
extreme 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 extreme
Black
White
Type of Face